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Presiding bishop calls communication 'the heart of the gospel,' vital for Anglican Communion

by Nan Ross

(ENS) Soon after a U.S. gathering of leaders of the 38 worldwide Anglican provinces, Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold told a group of Georgia Episcopalians, "If ever there is a communications need, it is with the larger Anglican Communion."

Griswold used a forum created by the Episcopal Media Center, an independent, nonprofit Atlanta-based ministry specializing in electronic communication and educational resources, to declare how struck he was "by the absolutely separate worlds the churches of the Anglican Communion live in and how little authentic communication there is between them."

More than 200 people gathered at Atlanta's Commerce Club March 27 to welcome the presiding bishop on his first official public visit to the Diocese of Atlanta. The event benefited the Episcopal Media Center, which has been serving Anglicans for 56 years.

Griswold noted the Media Center's logo bears the words "Linking the Gospel to the World." "My hope and my prayer," he said, "is that part of what we attend to as we link the gospel to the world is to link the Episcopal Church and other provinces of the Anglican Communion together using all the possibilities in electronic communication today so we can actually learn from one another and grow in deeper appreciation of all traditions and the life we share."

'Take the high road'

Griswold said there is a lot of "dubious communication that is making its way around the church, serving highly partisan ends and serving also causes of division and conflict, characterized by untruths and misrepresentation. This makes it all the more important to be clear about our communication, be wise ... and take the high road."

Griswold quoted the Rev. Louis Schuëddig, president of the Episcopal Media Center, who wrote recently, "I have long dreamed of a church that speaks with a common voice." "I echo that dream," Griswold said, of "a common voice that attends to what is clearly part of the common heritage, that which builds up, that which illumines and inspires, that which is clear and relevant, that is intelligent, that speaks the truth uncompromisingly and weaves into it the divergent dimensions of truth that exist among us."

The presiding bishop said in his travels he sees the Episcopal Church as alive and well and not wracked by controversy and conflict, as some choose to believe. "There are some estranged people that need to be ministered to in a pastoral sense," he said. "We have so many people who are bringing things together in Christ and focusing on mission and the work of reconciliation."

Statistics, which he said are "useful from time to time," show attendance in the Episcopal Church is up nine percent over previous years and giving "has increased quite markedly across the church."

Communication as communion

Expounding theologically about communication, Griswold said, "(It) is really at the very heart of the gospel," he said. "Communication is what the Bible is all about."

Griswold cited the Old Testament stories of creation, the exodus from Egypt and the messages from the prophets as examples of how God speaks to us. "The laws and commandments given to us are not so much laws and commandments as they are signs of relationship and intimacy between God and God's people."

In the New Testament, Griswold said, "God speaks to Mary through Gabriel and the word becomes flesh and lives among us...in the person of Jesus Christ, who addresses us and says, 'If you make your home in my word, you indeed will be my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.'"

He said God also communicates through the Holy Spirit, which pours God's spirit into us so God can speak through us.

"It's important to understand that "the communication of God is not about information; it's all about relationship," Griswold said.

He noted the words "communion" and "communication" come from the same Latin word, *communio*. "Communication and communion are really the same thing. (It's) about assisting God's self-revelation, serving the mystery that so deeply grafts and forms us, allowing Christ to be Christ in our world through us--through our deeds and through our gestures."

He said such communication must go throughout the world on a "a mission that must be carried out with passion, imagination, and--with a word (Southern writer) Flannery O'Connor used a lot--'gusto,' along with a deep resiliency and willingness to take risks."

'The heart of what we do'

Griswold said he had recently appointed a director of communication at the Episcopal Church Center in New York "because that's at the heart of what we do."

And he praised the collaborative efforts of the Episcopal Media Center and staff at the Church Center on recent and new programs, including a television advertising project, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes Hungry Hearts," and the proposed new educational resource, "Living With Money."

"Your mission is an extremely important one and continues to be," Griswold told Episcopal Media Center supporters. "I am very grateful for all those who do this work, pledge my support and look forward to a glorious future and building partnerships together in the service of the gospel."

--Nan Ross is an Episcopal Communicator and director of marketing for the Episcopal Media Center in Atlanta.

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